

California greenhouse gas law still has majority support, Field Poll finds

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The state's controversial global warming law still has the support of a majority of Californians despite growing doubts about its potential impact on the economy, according to a Field Poll released Tuesday.

The poll shows 58 percent of registered voters support Assembly Bill 32, which will require significant reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions. The poll was commissioned by Next 10, a San Francisco nonprofit group that supports green technology and reducing gases blamed for global warming.

Next 10 released the survey as AB 32 is essentially fighting for its life; a conservative group, bankrolled by Texas oil companies, is pushing a ballot initiative to delay the law's implementation until the economy recovers.

This was first time the Field organization asked Californians specifically about AB 32. But some slippage in support for the ideas behind AB 32 was revealed in a companion question that's been asked in previous years.

Asked about global warming and the economy, 69 percent of those surveyed said they believe the state can reduce greenhouse gases "and expand jobs and economic prosperity at the same time."

That was down from 74 percent in 2008 and 83 percent in 2007.

Poll director Mark DiCamillo said the diminished support reflects anxiety over the economy. In 2007, when support for the law was higher, "people were bolder in venturing into new kinds of policies," he said in an interview.

Nonetheless, he said a majority of Californians still believe the law won't harm the economy.

"They tend to believe ... it will add jobs in the long run rather than detract," he said.

Noel Perry, founder of Next 10, said: "It is not surprising that the current recession is causing somewhat greater uncertainty. Yet this research shows that large majorities of voters continue to believe that clean energy policies don't take jobs away."

Nonetheless, Jon Coupal, who is leading the drive to delay AB 32, said he thinks Californians are having second thoughts about the law. "As people come to understand the tremendous negative effects, real negative effects on the economy, ... we think people will be ready for change and ready for suspension (of the law)," said Coupal, head of the Howard Jarvis Taxpayers Association.

The law is supposed to take effect in 2012, although reductions in greenhouse gas emissions would phase in over the balance of the decade. The Coupal initiative would delay implementation

until the statewide unemployment rate, currently at 12.5 percent, falls below 5.5 percent.

Coupal said Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, who signed the bill into law, is sensing that Californians are getting nervous about AB 32. Last month Schwarzenegger urged regulators to phase in a key element of the law to give businesses more time to reduce emissions.

His aides say Schwarzenegger isn't backing away from AB 32; he's always advocated an approach that fights global warming without hurting the economy, they say.

Critics of AB 32 say the law will impose billions of dollars in new costs on the economy as industry struggles to reduce emissions. Supporters say businesses will become more efficient as they find ways to comply with the law – and will create new jobs installing solar panels, wind turbines and other green technologies.

Different groups have released studies predicting the law will usher in a new era of green prosperity – or bring the economy to its knees. The California Air Resources Board, which is in charge of fleshing out the rules of AB 32, released a study last month saying the law will do just minimal damage to the economy.

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